KDA

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determined. Howard said the company is looking at various locations along Highway 332, as well as two locations in Big Falls. However, he said they still need a bit more data about the sites before they can make a decision.

KDA member Wade Pavleck said he's been informing the city of Big Falls if the RECAP project is going to be built, it's going to be in Big Falls.

"The last I heard from this board, we will continue as long as Big Falls is the site, the projected location," Pavleck said. "And everything I'm reading in your preliminary stuff is indicating that's not going to happen."

A Jan. 19 letter to the KDA from Coronal provides a basic outline of the background that's been done on the Highway 332 and Big Falls sites. The letter references contamination issues with the site in Big Falls, which would be costly to mitigate.

"I've been telling the people in Big Falls this project is going there because that's where the county wants it to go," Pavleck said. "They are the community that wants the project."

Howard said there are positives and negatives to both potential project sites, and it's far too early to make a final decision on where the project will go.

"At this point, to say to any one community that the project is going to go in a specific spot, isn't necessarily prudent," Howard said. "Because we haven't made a decision, the results of the study aren't in yet."

Korstad said a site had been selected in the multimodal district with a full site plan one year ago, but because of pushback from residents living on Second Creek, a different site had to be determined.

Pavleck said Coronal officials had only looked at one site in Big Falls, and there are "thousands and thousands of acres" in the community that could be considered.

Korstad said they hadn't been made aware of other potential sites in the Big Falls area, and requested more information on any site the KDA Board wanted to offer up for consideration.

"We were operating off of what was presented as an alternate site by (KDA member Wayne) Skoe," Howard said.

Skoe and KDA member Rob Ecklund explained they had started looking at other sites in the Big Falls area, and had started gathering data on the sites. Howard responded those details weren't known to Coronal.

"The things that you guys have just identified, this is the first we're hearing of it," Howard said.

KDA Chairman Brian McBride said the goal for the project now is to move forward, and to provide details on potential sites to Coronal, so an informed decision can be made on a final project location.

"I agree, one of the issues that's before this board, and Coronal, is the sites need to be evaluated, and a decision has to be made, so you can move forward with the environmental assessment worksheets," McBride said.

Timeline

Grants for the project require the design to be 30 percent complete by the end of 2015, Korstad said, so that creates a decision point for the project. Coronal is in the process of obtaining a vast amount of information from the various vendors working on the project, and are processing all that data, he said.

Coronal will submit a report to the KDA Board once that process is complete, Korstad said, and the board will then make the decision whether to proceed with the project. Howard said they also need to present a report on the project sites to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency for environmental assessment, a review process that might take up to five months.

"What we're trying to do is to present a detailed, complete package," Howard said. "So there will be minimal interaction coming back with additional questions regarding the site, the design, things along those lines, because it all would have been worked out."

The funding deadline at the end of 2015 creates a "sense of urgency" for the project, Howard said, which means more delays would be costly.

"It's doable, but we're going to have to work," Howard said. "We can't continue to afford any additional delays, we have to get the work done."

While the delays the project has encountered regarding site selection have created a time crunch, Howard said they've benefitted from technology incorporated in the project improving over time.

"We are the beneficiaries of the advances in the technology over that timeframe," Howard said.

Coronal has worked with a wide variety of outside vendors who specialize in the technology used in the project, Howard said. Because of the added time, Coronal has been able to "hold their feet to the fire" to encourage these outside vendors to improve their schematics and technology for the project.

Project basics

RECAP would take solid waste, pulled from Koochiching County and surrounding areas, and through a plasma gasification process, convert it into a liquid fuel. The liquid fuel, called syngas, can then be converted into different types of fuel products.

The diesel fuel produced by the RECAP facility provides benefits of renewable energy, Howard said, and also performs better as a cold-weather fuel than traditional, renewable diesel.

The facility can be broken down into units, or silos, Howard said. The first silo involves processing and sorting the solid waste delivered to the facility. Because of the longer timeline, the vendors involved in that process have been able to streamline it to reduce costs, which will make it more attractive for outside groups to bring their waste to the facility, he said.

The second silo is where the plasma gasification process takes place, Howard said. Production models for the facility are based on gasifying 200 tons of waste per day, he said.

The third silo is where the syngas produced by the plasma gasification process is converted into a fuel product, Howard said. A final decision hasn't been made on which specific fuel will be produced, but he said it could range from diesel fuel to jet fuel.

In the end, what will make the RECAP facility work is its technical components, which will be top-notch, Howard said.

"We're really pulling from the best, of the best, of the best," Howard said. "Not only in the United States, but worldwide."

SCHOOL

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"The foundation believes students are entitled to the best education we can provide them," said Mary Bigler, the foundation's director. "Our purpose is enhancing the quality of education in ISD 361."

International Falls Mayor Bob Anderson serves on the foundation's board and said the group of people who chartered the effort realized the financial need of teachers to keep quality education flowing.

"We all had great feelings for the school," he said of those who were part of the foundation in its infancy. "We all had special teachers who were mentors to us...We wanted to give students the same opportunities we had, so we looked to see what we could do to help the school district."

The group realized the competition involved for state and federal school funding and decided the best way to give back to the district that helped nurture them into successful adults was to raise money to help produce quality education.

"We've done pancake feeds, but the biggest contributions come from alumni," Anderson said.

Through the school's All Class Reunion and alumni newsletter efforts started by Janet Shickell and Kay Herman, contributions to the district come in almost weekly, Anderson said.

"The money has just continued to come in," he said. "Alumni feel strongly about (the district) and they, too, want to see students succeed."

Helpful dollars

In 2014, the foundation was able to provide $12,029 toward academics and another $8,397 to extra curricular activities.

"We all feel so good that we are able to provide," Bigler said. "It really is a jubilee meeting when we figure out how much we can give out and where the money is going to."

Auran said foundation funds have allowed her to purchase seat sacks for the back of students' chairs.

"In my classroom, we have tables instead of desks, so the seat sacks help with organizing our space and the management of materials," she said.

Auran added game boards with words and phrases were also purchased to help classroom volunteers educate the students.

"I am so thankful for this source of funding," Auran said of foundation dollars. "Our kids are truly the ones who benefit."

Within means

While Auran and many other teachers are able to purchase much-needed supplies for their classrooms, the need is still high, Bigler said.

"Demand has increased this year due to state funding changes," she said. "It feels good to say 'yes,' but we also have to say 'no,' and that is hard."

When the foundation board has money to work with, Bigler said it is very careful to allocate funds appropriately.

"We vote, we talk, we make sure we are good stewards of the money that is donated," she said. "Teachers have so many needs and while we consider every request, some of them don't fall within our purpose."

Still, Bigler and Anderson are hopeful the help of the board to the schools can only continue to produce top-notch education for Borderland's youth.

"Education is the key to success in the world," Anderson said. "The better the education, the better the student and future citizen. We love this school, its teachers and its students."

FORUM

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The title may be "a bit of a mouthful," said Sellers, but will likely be of great interest following record flooding in the watershed last spring.

When the International Joint Commission revised the rule curve that sets levels on Rainy Lake and Namakan Reservoir, it scheduled a review of the effects of the change for 2015.

As a result, a variety of studies intended to measure the effects of the rule curve change were set in motion. The March forum will feature 14 of those studies presented in the special focus session.

Locally, Sellers said a presentation on the comparison of the 1970 rule curve to the 2000 rule curve will offer an analysis of the difference, if any, of lake regulation. And a number of the presentations will consider changes in fish habitat and reproduction, he said.

In addition to the special focus, Sellers said the usual topics related to the Rainy-Lake of the Woods basin will be discussed, including nutrients and water quality, algae, aquatic invasive species, remote sensing, modeling, paleolimnology, fisheries, and climate change, among others.

While this is a professional symposium intended for researchers and resource managers working and interested in research and management activities related to the International Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed, several topics may be of interest to the general public, he said.

The forum is in it's 12th year, and in its second year under a new name that reflects the growth in interest, investment and activity by the research community in the watershed, said Sellers.

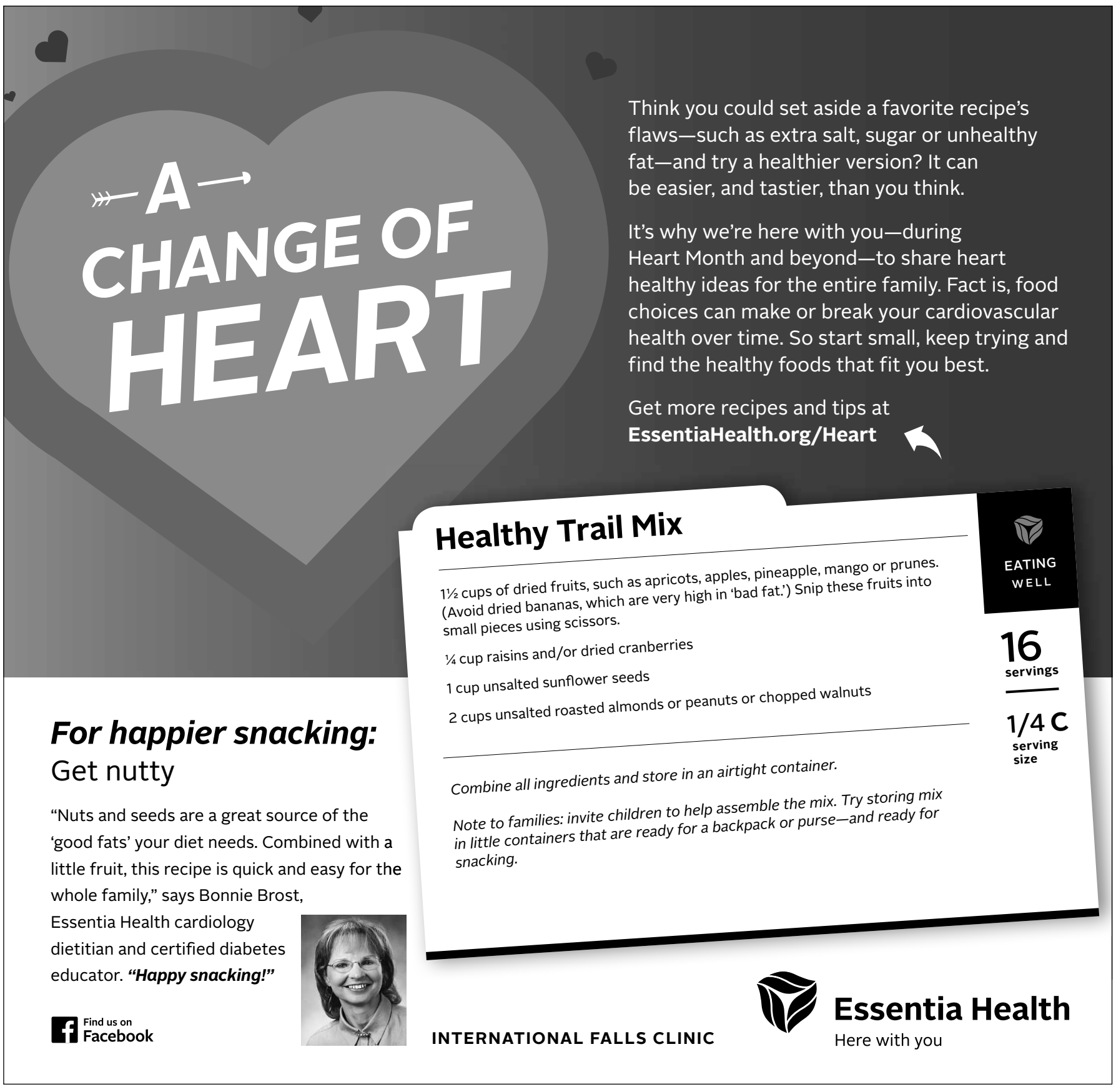
While the foundation takes the lead, he recognized a large group of partnering agencies that help bring the forum together. Sponsors of the forum help to keep it affordable and ongoing and range from organizations such as the Rainy Lake Conservancy, lake property owner associations to government agencies on both sides of the border. He noted the Canadian Consulate in Minneapolis is again helping to sponsor the forum.

Sellers said the event is expected to be bigger and better this year, with 30 presentations on the results of science and natural resources projects in the watershed. This year, an expanded session will display 16 posters which are presentations by researchers and resource mangers in graphical display format.

"In some cases they are works in progress, in other cases there was no room on the presentation schedule," he said.

With about a month left for registration, Sellers said about 100 people have already committed to attend the forum. Last year's record attendance of 140 people may be surpassed this year because of the added interest in the water level issues.

The evening reception on March 11 will feature guest speaker John Linc Stine, commissioner of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

"It represents interest and commitment of Minnesota to watershed to have the head of the agency be our guest speaker," said Sellers. "It's a strong indication of the importance the MPCA puts on the work going on in watershed."

For more information or to register for the forum, visit www.lowwsf.com/forum.html